



The Ten Commandments – Part 6
Exodus 20:4-6
GCSP – 08/08/2009

As most of you know, I really enjoy books. I know several of you in here tonight are also avid readers but we are a vanishing breed I'm afraid. Through the years I have tried to convey my love of books to my family to no avail. So instead of books or a gift certificate to Mardel or Family Christian Stores or even Barnes & Noble, I get T-shirts and ties and various other less desired gifts for my birthday and Christmas. It is as if we live in a generation that does not see any value in reading.

Reading is vitally important in the Christian's life. I know reading is not easy for some but it does not lessen its importance. God gave us His Word in written form. The tendency for us to avoid reading carries with it a tendency to avoid the Bible; and beloved, we simply cannot grow near as much as we should apart from the Bible.

I have a decent library in my home that I add to often, and there are a handful of pastor/teacher/authors that I enjoy reading more than others (and I am finding that my favorite authors have been or are currently pastors – probably because they not only have a depth of knowledge but also a depth of experience). Two of these favorites are Matthew Henry and Charles Spurgeon.

Both of these men were born and raised and held their ministries in England, and both lived several centuries ago. Quite often as I read the books and sermons and commentaries these men have left behind for our benefit, I come across words I am not familiar with. These words were commonplace in their day but for one reason or another they simply vanished off the scene through the years. Maybe other words with similar meanings took over in most people's vocabularies, or maybe the meaning of the word stopped being of use as the culture evolved.

A word in our modern vocabulary that is danger of becoming extinct is responsibility. It's not that a similar word has taken over but that we have unfortunately raised a generation or two that wants nothing to do with it. Nobody takes responsibility for their own actions anymore and nobody wants responsibility for anything anymore.

Shirking responsibility is contagious and it is spreading like the plague. We blame one or both of our parents for all of our inadequacies and faults. We blame the banks and credit card companies for the state of our financial situation. We blame the schools and the media for the spread of liberalism. By the tone of the emails I receive we blame president Obama for the moral decline of our country, and we blame the government for just about everything else.

I'm not necessarily directing any of this rant toward any of you here tonight, so take this question for what it's worth; but, are you responsible for anything in your life today? The actions of most people today point to an answer of "No."

This pervasive attitude in our world has spilled over into the church just like anything else the world manufactures. Most of the churches I have been involved in through the

years are in a constant mode of begging for people to be responsible for a ministry in the church. The common excuse is simply, "I don't feel led to be involved." And while I believe it is very important to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, I am afraid most Christians cannot determine the leading of the Spirit any more than they can determine what the direction of the wind will be at any given moment, and the overwhelming majority of examples we have in Scripture are of people jumping to the call as soon as a need arises, not of them taking a month to pray about it.

But I digress. The main point concerning responsibility I want us to consider tonight is the responsibility you have for your own life and your own relationship with God. Even if you have shirked your responsibility to parents, spouses, children, friends, and bosses in the past, do not allow these failures to spill over into your responsibility for your own life and for your relationship with God.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Exodus**.

Exodus 20:4-6

Let's pray.

Last week we spent our time working through **verse 4** and the beginning of **verse 5**. Allow me to do a quick review before we move on to the rest of this passage.

God is basically saying to us: "I am your God. I am your Redeemer. I have saved you and bought you for Myself with an extreme price. Please do not put anything in the place that belongs to Me. I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have cared for you, protected you, provided for you, and blessed you. Now, because I love you I am asking you to have no other gods in your life; that I would be the only One."

We then briefly discussed some of the more common idols and images we worship and serve in the place of God: Materialism, power, pleasure, leisure, fame and status. And the reason we set up these idols in our life is we are not satisfied with God; we are not content with His provision and thus we have allowed our hearts and minds to stray away from our first and true love, just like a husband or wife strays when they are not satisfied with their spouse.

We choose to give the best of our time, our talents, our treasures, and our energies to these images and idols. Your life is in essence invested in these other images and they are your gods. They seductively call to you and promise to give you your best life right now. They whisper in your ear and take your breath away. They capture your heart, your attention, your interest, your time, your money, and your commitment.

We then read in the **Psalms** and in **Jeremiah** of how we become like the things we worship. When we follow worthless idols we become worthless ourselves; when we walk after emptiness we become empty. The curse of creating and worshipping and serving images and idols is that you will be deceived into believing that these things can fulfill you and satisfy you. God knows that none of these things can ever satisfy the longings of your heart. No amount of money, possessions, power, pleasure, leisure, fame, or status will even come close to filling the emptiness in your heart and soul.

And let me add one thing before we move on: Even if an image or idol is made to represent God, this commandment prohibits that.

The Children of Israel had Aaron create a golden calf when Moses stayed on the mountain with God for too much time. If you carefully read the account you will find that they were not creating this god to necessarily dishonor the one true God (at least in their minds); the account is clear that this calf was to represent the God who brought them out of Egypt. They were looking for something to worship that they could see and touch. But even this is an abomination to God.

God is infinite and holy and righteous and just and all-powerful and all-knowing. God cannot be contained by anything or imagined or described. Any man-made depiction or creation will be a horrible injustice to the awesomeness and majesty and reality of who God truly is. This may be sacrilege to some, but I would go so far as to say that Michelangelo's depiction of God on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is a violation of the second commandment.

But more so than just the images and depictions being a violation, it is the worship of these images and depictions that violate this commandment. We simply cannot worship anything or anyone except God; not a golden calf, not a glorious and magnificent painting, not a crucifix, not the sun, not the stars, not your spouse, not your children, not the Pope, and not anything else in this universe.

Hold your place in **Exodus** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Romans**.

Romans 1:18-25

The wrath of God is on those who worship anything but Him. And God turns you over to these images you worship; He fulfills the promises of **Psalm 135:15-18** and **Jeremiah 2:5** by making you just like the gods you have created and have chosen to worship and serve.

Romans 1:25-32

He goes on to say that those who worship and serve any other gods beside the one true God will be turned over to degrading passions and to a depraved mind. You will be filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, hatred of God, insolence, arrogance, boastfulness, and disobedience to parents. You will lack understanding, trust, love and mercy. And lastly you will be self-righteous and you will heartily approve of others who engage in the same debasing activities that you do.

This is the destiny of all who reject the one true God; a destiny that ends in being cast into the Lake of Fire that burns forever and ever.

Man has created so many religions and denominations. Some have been in existence for centuries but hundreds more, if not thousands, are created every year. Whether it is as old as the Catholic Church and the Baptist denomination, or as new as the Emergent church movement or any number of New Age sects, all were created by man. God created the true church and it was created to spread the gospel message and to promote adherence to His commandments and His Word.

It is utterly ridiculous when you take a step back and analyze all of the man-made traditions, rules, and regulations of the long-standing churches and denominations, and all of the silly quirks and rituals of the newer "religions" that have come on the scene in the last several decades. How naïve are people to fall into the traps and lies of Satan to be so easily duped into believing the creations of men, or more aptly, demons – and anything that does not have its origin in the Bible, and does not 100% adhere to the Bible is from Satan. I don't care if the person teaching and promoting it is well-known and has a worldwide television ministry, and I don't care if it comes from the mouth or pen of the Pope, if it is not found in the Bible it comes from Satan.

I will go so far as to say that behind every idol, every image, and every counterfeit religion, there is a demon or demons to deceive, mislead, and eventually destroy.

John 10:10 says, "**The thief** (which is Satan) **comes only to steal and kill and destroy...**"

1 Corinthians 10:20-21 says, "**But I say that the things which the Gentiles** (pagans or unbelievers) **sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.**"

And on a side note, can I warn you to be careful in how much attention and focus you give to demons? Satan and his demons are very real and we must be prepared to do battle against them by filling our minds and hearts with God's Word, but don't glorify them by attributing every hangnail and every inconvenience in your life to them. God will make it clear to you and He will empower you to deal with the situation if a demon is involved, otherwise don't even bother to give them the courtesy of being on your lips.

And that brings us to the rest of the second commandment (which, by the way, God never numbered them or called them the Ten Commandments – some believe what we are studying last week and tonight is just an extension of the first command to have no other gods before Him). Maybe more appropriately, this brings us to the reasoning behind the second commandment and the cursing and blessing attached to it.

Turn with me in your Bibles back to **Exodus 20**.

First, the reasoning behind the commandment to not have any idols or images in your life – the Lord your God is a jealous God.

v. 5a

I briefly mentioned last week that the sin of idolatry is most often compared to and illustrated by adultery, harlotry, and other sexual sin. The entire Book of Hosea focuses on this aspect of idolatry.

Hosea the prophet is told by God to marry the harlot, Gomer. The man of God is told by God to marry a practicing prostitute in the plain sight of the nation of Israel. The sense of the story is that even after the marriage, Gomer continues to practice her trade; she

is continually unfaithful to her new husband. She becomes pregnant only God knows if her children belong to Hosea or some other man on the streets.

Gomer eventually leaves Hosea and runs away so she can have complete freedom to be with any and every man she desires. In a short period of time she finds herself stripped naked, standing on a platform in front of the entire town, and being auctioned off as a slave to the highest bidder.

This is idolatry. As the people of Israel would have felt sorry for the man of God to have to go through the indignity and shame of having a wife who prefers to be a whore, God shows them that their pursuit of other gods, and their idols and images puts God through the same indignity and shame. God is represented by Hosea and the people of Israel are represented by the whore.

Pretty harsh, but that's not the end of the story. Hosea is the one who outbids all others, buys Gomer back, and takes her home. This is the love God has for us. No matter how far gone you are or think you are, God has paid the price to redeem you and to bring you to Himself.

So God is jealous of any and all images, idols, and false gods you choose to worship and serve over or even alongside of Him.

The curse and the blessing that is attached to our disobedience or obedience to this command is weighty and worthy of our consideration. We have already seen the immediate curse in the passage we read in Romans, directed at those who have completely rejected God, but here we see that there is the possibility of long-term generational repercussions for all who worship and serve other gods, idols and images.

v. 5b

At first glance, this curse appears to be saying that the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of those who reject God will be punished for the sins of the offender. So before I deal with what is meant by this passage let's quickly look at another.

Again, hold your place in **Exodus** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Deuteronomy**.

Deuteronomy 24:16

The principle given here in the Law of God is that each one of us is responsible for our own life and our own sins. The sins your father or grandfather or great-grandfather committed are not applied to you; you are not responsible for them and will not be punished for them. Your responsibility lies in your life and how you respond to God's Law – not anyone else's. But, as I hopefully related in the opening comments, you most definitely have responsibility for your own actions, for your own life, and for your own relationship with God.

We won't take the time to look these up, but we have several instances just in the line of kings in Judah where an evil father was succeeded by a righteous son.

So as you turn back to **Exodus 20**, what does it mean then that God visits the iniquities of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations?

The warning is in the truth that fathers (and mothers) have a great deal of influence on their children. We see it all the time. The children of alcoholics are exponentially more likely to become alcoholics than the children of parents who don't drink. Abused children are much more likely to become abusers as well when they have children. None of these are iron-clad and none of them are excuses but the odds are much higher for repeated behavior.

The direct context of this passage though is that the fathers who reject God are more than likely going to produce generations that also reject God. This is not a curse that blocks the children from worshipping and serving the true God, for once again the responsibility lies within each individual, but you should consider yourself immensely blessed if God snatched you out of the darkness and broke the chain that was in your family line.

How many of you in here were saved by God but had both parents as unbelievers? To your knowledge were your grandparents or great-grandparents believers? Were there any aunts, uncles, cousins or other family members that were believers and thus had some impact on your life?

Any who were genuine believers, along with you, are chain breakers. You now have the opportunity and the responsibility to pass the love of Christ and the gospel message of salvation down to the generations that follow you. What a glorious privilege. We can obviously pray for and witness to our unbelieving parents and grandparents, but more so than your children and grandchildren, that has to be left in God's hands. Your influence is somewhat limited in these relationships in this regard. Your greatest influence is on the generations that come after you – especially while they are still young; while they look up to you and follow after the things you follow after.

v. 6

I don't know if you grasp the greatness of our God in this verse. The Hebrew rendering of this verse literally means the blessing for obedience to loving God enough to not allow any idols or images to take His place in your life is your godly influence will be felt for a thousand generations.

Deuteronomy 7:9 says, "Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments."

Wow! The influence of unbelieving parents may last to the third and fourth generation but the influence of a godly and righteous parent lasts for a thousand generations! How awesome is that?

But then again, how humbling is that? How much responsibility do you now feel to live a godly and righteous life? Does it give you pause to consider the idols and images that you have set up in your life? Do the gods of materialism, power, pleasure, leisure, fame,

status, or any of a multitude of others have a place in your heart or life that belongs exclusively to God? Have you shirked your responsibility in any way?

Let's pray.